



**pathways**  
of women's  
empowerment

# Case Study: Conditional Cash Transfers in Egypt

## Summary

Conditional Cash Transfers have become a popular method of offering state support to ultra-poor families. They are designed to break the cycle of inter-generational poverty, with the idea that families are active participants in a scheme that has developmental objectives, rather than a 'band aid' mentality. The CCTs programme in Ain el-Sira, Cairo, one of the first of its kind to be launched in the Arab world, was shaped by a Pathways conference which brought together experts from Brazil, Mexico and Ecuador. The conference looked at the proposed CCTs design, discussed best practices and potential obstacles to effectiveness and, in particular, how existing programmes both empowered or disempowered women.

The Egyptian CCTs programme works with low-income families, especially mothers and female heads of household, with school-aged children. The families are given monetary transfers from the Egyptian government on certain conditions (minimum school attendance, regular visits to health clinics, nutrition).

The programme has an explicitly feminist design that tries to take into account gender critiques of other CCT schemes. For example, while women receive the cash transfer and are responsible for the fulfillment of the programme's conditions, emphasis is placed on other interventions to alleviate burdens placed on them. They are compensated for any time spent fulfilling programme conditions and female children receive more



Family in Ain es-Sira, Cairo. Photo: Heba Gowayed

money for staying enrolled in school than male children. Also, the programme promotes a sense of citizenship amongst female beneficiaries that is central to the scheme.

## Research Process

Dr Hania Sholkamy and her team at the Social Research Centre of the American University in Cairo used over two years of qualitative and quantitative research to inform the design of the CCT pilot scheme. The project included a survey of 400 slum dwelling families, focus groups and home visits with 30 women and 10 men. The research looked at families' health, decision-making in the household, access to resources, work, income and debt. During the project 240 social workers were trained, and the team surveyed 7000 families on the impact of CCTs. The pilot has been monitored and evaluated since its launch in March 2009, and in August 2010 was extended to 65 villages in Upper Egypt.

*"What Pathways has enabled us to do is to learn from Brazil and elsewhere and our own experiences, what a programme would look like if it was empowering through women's individual rights."*

Hania Sholkamy, Ain es-Sira research team leader

## Policy Recommendations

- Women should be a priority for social protection. Feminist principles and practice should inform social protection policies.
- Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) transfer power as well as money to women. The most empowering CCTs strengthen women's citizenship, equipping women with knowledge, spaces and networks with which to claim their entitlements.
- Three main elements can contribute to making CCTs a vehicle for increasing women's citizenship. Design the programme from a woman's point of view; conditions and co-responsibility can be empowering for women; and the money needs to be protected.
- Make women's citizenship an objective in itself, so that women's social and political rights are protected.
- Women cannot become more powerful by money alone but the combination of cash, service provider support and co-responsibilities can together address power disparities.
- Conditions or co-responsibilities can enable women to fund decisions that would otherwise require a male or older person's authority and approval.

## References

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Heba Gowayed (2010) 'Gender, Space, and Citizenship: Women in the Margins of a Cairene Slum', paper presented at the Eleventh Mediterranean Research Meeting, Florence, 24-27 March

Hania Sholkamy (2010) 'No Path to Power: Civil Society, State Services, and the Poverty of City Women', *IDS Bulletin* 41.2: 46-53

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## Key Findings

1. Women's social security tends to be regarded as an aspect of familial or reproductive roles, so women gain their entitlements as dependents not individuals, this is increasingly out of step with women's contemporary reality.
2. Taking a citizenship approach to cash transfers can enhance their poverty-reducing effects and produce broader empowering outcomes for beneficiaries.
3. Training for front-line workers delivering CCT programmes can have transformative effects on the way these programmes are received, with empowering dimensions.
4. There are substantial benefits of coupling CCT programmes with other interventions, such as citizenship and employment training – these are more than simply additive, they offer a genuinely transformative dimension.
5. While there is no one-size-fits-all model, there are elements of good practice (bankerising payments, for example) that can be built into programmes which can have wider impacts on their potential for empowering beneficiaries.

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